

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**SYRIA: REASSESSING U.S. APPROACH AND OPTIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Syria's support to the Iraq insurgency and Washington's inability to ameliorate the regime's behavior or to achieve its other national interests with regard to Syria, threaten America's Middle East objectives. However, Syria now appears vulnerable as it contends with waning control of Lebanon, internal political and socio-economic challenges, and increasing international pressure and isolation. Syria's vulnerability has led to a hard-line U.S. policy approach and growing calls for regime change. However, unintended consequences of regime change could exacerbate U.S. ability to attain regional objectives. Furthermore, Syria's vulnerability presents new options and opportunities to refine U.S. national strategy to achieve interests and ends without resorting to regime change. This research project begins by analyzing U.S. interests regarding Syria, the strategy for achieving them, and assesses current effectiveness in accomplishing them. The study then examines benefits and risks of forcing a regime change versus pursuing a strategy of engagement and incentives, combined with selective diplomatic and economic pressure and threat of force, to achieve U.S. aims. The following analysis suggests that regime change may be unnecessary and counterproductive. Finally, based on the preceding analysis, the project makes recommendations for refining U.S. strategy in applying national power to achieve U.S. interests with Syria.



## SYRIA: REASSESSING U.S. APPROACH AND OPTIONS

Within days of the Al Qaeda attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush declared, "And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."<sup>1</sup> Syria's support to the insurgency in Iraq, along with its enduring support of anti-Israeli terrorist organizations operating out of Lebanon, indicates that the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad appears to have made a patent decision to side with the terrorists.<sup>2</sup>

Syria's actions with regard to Iraq pose a grave and direct threat to America's ability to establish peace and stability in Iraq and directly threaten U.S. interests and prospects for peace throughout the Middle East. Moreover, despite a long history of engagement with Syria, U.S. strategy has been largely unsuccessful, as it has neither achieved any of its regional or national interests with Syria, nor has it ameliorated the regime's behavior.<sup>3</sup> However, Syria now appears to be in its most vulnerable position in decades as it contends with waning control of Lebanon, internal political and socio-economic challenges, and increasing international pressure and isolation. Moreover, despite his uncontested assumption of power and his subsequent reform initiatives, which have included efforts to combat corruption and the relaxing of Baathist political oppressiveness, many still question the true extent of Bashar Assad's control over the Syrian government. Personal inexperience and the understandable difficulty in changing the direction of a staid, Soviet-style bureaucracy could explain the apparent lack of success in his reform attempts to gain traction and could account for such strategic missteps as in his handling of the Lebanese crisis a manner that resulted in Syria having to withdraw its forces. However, many pundits also point to these examples as evidence that Bashar is not in full control of the Baathist regime, but rather "remains circumscribed by power elites who had served under his father and have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo."<sup>4</sup> Although this question remains unanswered, either of the most probable explanations serve to further highlight the fragility and precariousness of Syria's current internal and external political positions.

Syria's increased vulnerability combined with United States dissatisfaction over its inability to adequately diminish Syria's intransigence, especially with regard to its support for the insurgency in Iraq, has led to a hard-line U.S. policy approach and growing calls for a regime change in Syria as the only feasible solution remaining to resolve the Syrian problem. However, we must question whether regime change is warranted as the best solution to achieve our aims

with Syria. Could a fresh, alternative analysis of U.S. options, considered in light of the current Syrian vulnerability, yield potentially new opportunities to refine U.S. national strategy that will achieve national interests and ends short of resorting to a regime change? To answer this question, this research project will analyze U.S. interests, our strategy for achieving them, and the degree to which we have been effectual. The study then examines the potential advantages and risks associated with forcing a regime change in Syria versus pursuing a strategy that combines engagement and incentives along with selective diplomatic and economic pressures backed by threat of force to achieve our aims. The analysis that follows suggests that a regime change may be unnecessary and even counterproductive to U.S. interests. Finally, based on the preceding analysis, the project makes recommendations for refining U.S. strategy for the application of national power to achieve our national security objectives with regard to Syria.

#### U.S. Interests and Impediments to Full U.S.-Syrian Cooperation

The fundamental American interests in Syria mirror those that it aspires to foster in its relationship with any other nation in the world. Clearly articulated in the U.S. National Security Strategy, those interests include the following: “protecting human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom....fighting terrorists and tyrants...encouraging free and open societies [holding] to account nations...who harbor terrorists....[and] bringing the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.”<sup>5</sup> However, President Bush also recently reiterated what amounts to the specific, long held, but still unachieved, U.S. interests regarding Syria. He stated, “They can’t house terrorist groups that will destroy the peace process with Israel and Palestine...they should stop meddling in Lebanon... [and] they should stop allowing transit of bombers and killers into Iraq....”<sup>6</sup> A fourth interest, which was not mentioned during this particular interview, is U.S. concern over Syrian arms proliferation and its potential to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD).<sup>7</sup> Understanding the nature of these U.S. interests, their relative importance, and where we stand with regard to achieving them, is an essential first step in refining strategy and options for engagement with Syria.

#### Arab-Israeli Peace Process

The United States is committed to ensuring Israel’s security; therefore, achieving progress in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process is an over-arching U.S. interest in the Middle East. Any U.S. policy or strategy refinement designed to engage Syria must be consistent with this fundamental interest for it to be considered viable and acceptable. Historically, Syria has been an integral and often influential actor in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, and its role centers mainly on two

essential issues: Israeli-Syrian disputes over the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Syrian support to anti-Israeli terrorist groups.

#### Golan Heights

Israel occupied the Golan Heights, a 450 square mile area of southwest Syria with a commanding elevation overlooking Israel, and the city of Quneitra, at the end of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Israel then occupied additional Syrian territory following the October 1973 War. As part the May 1974 disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel, Israel returned to the Syrians the newly occupied territory, along with Quneitra. However, for reasons of security, Israel retained the strategic Golan Heights.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent peace talks over the last decade between the two countries have centered on the Golan issue, with Syria insisting on full Israeli withdrawal in return for normalized, peaceful relations. The two sides nearly reached an agreement in 2000, but peace talks ended prematurely in September, upon the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada. Relations between Syria and Israel steadily worsened as Syria continued its support for Palestinian terrorist groups that were attacking Israeli forces and Israeli civilians. Negotiations have yet to resume, but both sides have made tentative, yet positive, overtures for their resumption.<sup>9</sup>

#### Syrian Involvement in Lebanon and Support to Lebanon-based Terrorist Groups

Another key obstacle to improved U.S.-Syrian relations, Israeli security, and the entire Peace Process have been decades of Syrian influence in Lebanon and its long history of support for anti-Israeli terrorist groups located there. During the Lebanese Civil War, in 1976, Syria sent 35,000 soldiers as a peacekeeping force into Lebanon at the request of the Lebanese government to protect the Christian population from the Muslims. For the next thirty years, despite a 1989 U.N. agreement (the Taif Agreement) calling for withdrawal of all foreign forces beginning in 1992, Syria continued to maintain a major military and intelligence presence in most of Lebanon and exerted significant influence in the internal politics and other affairs of that nation.<sup>10</sup> Throughout its involvement in Lebanon, Syria has also provided safe haven and support for the Lebanese Hezbollah and various Palestinian terrorist groups that continue to launch attacks against Israeli forces and conduct terrorism against Israeli civilians.<sup>11</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State, Syria continues to support these terrorist groups and allows Iran to provide supplies to Hezbollah by way of Damascus. Furthermore, "Syrian officials have publicly condemned international terrorism, but they make a clear distinction between terrorism and what they consider to be the legitimate armed resistance by Palestinians in the occupied territories and by the Lebanese Hezbollah."<sup>12</sup>

In September 2004, the United Nations Security Council, led by France and the United States, dealt a major blow to Syria when it adopted Resolution 1559, calling for the complete withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. The U.N. Security Council acted on what the international community saw as unacceptable Syrian pressure on the Lebanese government to amend its constitution to allow a three-year term extension for its Syrian-backed President, Emile Lahoud—pressure that stemmed from Syrian fears of a possible victory by an anti-Syrian opposition candidate. Resolution 1559 also called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a reference to Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.”<sup>13</sup> While still awaiting the Security Council’s determination on how to enforce the resolution, on February 14, 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, whom most credit with the success of Lebanese reconstruction following its civil war and who was an opponent of Syrian occupation, died in a car bomb attack in Beirut. Syria immediately became the leading suspect in Hariri’s murder, which sparked widespread demonstrations by Lebanese opposition parties and an incensed population.<sup>14</sup> Bowing to Lebanese and international pressure, Syria withdrew the last of its overt forces on April 26, 2005, thus officially ending nearly thirty years of military presence in Lebanon. However, most assume that at least a covert Syrian intelligence presence remains.<sup>15</sup>

The international community continues to press Syria through a second resolution, UNSCR 1595. Unanimously passed by the Security Council, Resolution 1595 establishes “an international independent investigation commission (“the Commission”) based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of all aspects of this terrorist act [Hariri’s assassination], including to help identify its perpetrators, sponsors, organizers and accomplices.”<sup>16</sup> The Commission’s investigation, headed by U.N. Special Representative, the Berlin prosecutor Detlev Mehlis (the Resolution 1595 effort is often referred to as the Mehlis report or investigation), is ongoing, and while it has yet to conclusively prove Syria’s involvement in Hariri’s murder, many indications point in that direction. Shortly after the investigation began, the former head of Syrian Intelligence in Lebanon, Ghazi Kanaan, committed—or was forced to commit—suicide, many believe because of his role or knowledge regarding the Hariri assassination. Thus far, the investigation casts suspicion on several Lebanese with close ties to Syria, including a member of the Lebanese parliament. Additionally, several high ranking Syrian officials are under suspicion as a result of an earlier version of the report that “listed the names...including President Assad’s brother Maher al-Assad and the President’s brother-in-law Assef Shawkat, chief of military intelligence and widely considered the second most powerful official in the [Syrian] regime.”<sup>17</sup> Although the resolution does not call



for immediate or specific sanctions against Syria, the United Nations can impose such penalties if deemed appropriate. However, perhaps the most important aspect of the resolution is, as U.S. Ambassador John R. Bolton has pointed out, “that the resolution was adopted under the rubric of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which gives the Council the power to impose punishment, including the use of military force.”<sup>18</sup> Syria’s apparent turn of fortune in Lebanon and the accompanying international pressure is an encouraging development for the furtherance of U.S. regional interests. However, it is too early to tell if it marks the beginning of the end for the Assad regime. Conversely, if Bashar manages to navigate through and weather the Lebanon crisis, he may even emerge in the end as a stronger leader with a firmer grip on the staid Syrian Baathist bureaucracy.

#### Syrian Support to the Insurgency in Iraq

Finally, in what is America’s most immediate interest with Syria, the Assad regime continues to be a vital source of external support for the insurgency in Iraq, and, as such, it undermines significantly U.S. efforts to stabilize and rebuild that nation. U.S. demands of Syria concerning its involvement in Iraq are clear: “prevent the crossing of the Syrian/Iraqi border by Iraqi insurgents; arrest and hand over insurgent supporters located in Syria, in particular former elements of Saddam Hussein’s regime; [and] turn over Iraqi assets held in Syrian banks.”<sup>19</sup> The Syrian government contends that it has and continues to comply with these demands, even though its actions and the evidence suggests otherwise. According to U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad, “Syria is the number one offender in the Middle East region working to impede the success of Iraq.”<sup>20</sup>

The most common accusation of Syrian support for the insurgency is its failure to control its border with Iraq. Whether it deliberately looks the other way or just passively ignores the problem, the result is that Syria allows a free flow of Iraqi insurgents and foreign jihadists to infiltrate Iraq, thus contributing significantly to the strength and continuance of the insurgency by providing sanctuary for the insurgents and jihadists.<sup>21</sup> Most evidence suggests that Syrian involvement has been far from passive. In addition to harboring insurgents and allowing Islamic extremists (to allegedly include Abu Musab Al Zarqawi) to recruit fighters, Syria also provides money from donors and the necessary documents to facilitate insurgent movement into Iraq using routes “known to Syrian Intelligence.”<sup>22</sup> On at least one occasion, captured foreign insurgents claimed, “they were trained, controlled and paid by Syrian intelligence officials ...[and were] instructed to kidnap, behead and assassinate Iraqi security forces.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, analysts are in almost universal agreement that senior-level, former Baathists from the Saddam

regime enjoy sanctuary in Syria, where they continue to plan, finance, and support insurgent activity in Iraq.<sup>24</sup> Despite Syrian denials of such activity, as recently as last February, “after months of American pressure and accusations...Syria...handed over Sabawi Ibrahim Hassan, Saddam Hussein’s half-brother and a leading financier for the insurgency.”<sup>25</sup> Syria, however, still steadfastly denies that it actively supports the insurgency or harbors Saddamists.

#### Current US Policy and its effectiveness Vis-à-vis Syria

A confluence of recent events in conjunction with a long-term lack of progress in dealing with the Syrian regime has resulted in Washington adopting a tougher policy approach with the Assad government. In addition to a common U.S. perception that Basher is an already weak leader plagued by serious internal social and economic problems, analysts see the Syrian position exacerbated by increased international and regional condemnation over its failure to comply fully with United Nations resolutions concerning Lebanon; its meddling in internal Lebanese politics, as demonstrated by Syrian influence in the extension of pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud’s term of office; and finally, the widely assumed Syrian complicity in the murder of Rafik Hariri. These events, combined with the 2000 disintegration of Israeli-Syrian peace talks, continued United States frustration with what it views as Syria’s refusal to make adequate progress toward renouncing its support for terrorists and to cooperate in the Iraq War, and failure to implement internal democratic reforms, has led the United States to pursue a more aggressive path with Syria. This new course is a departure from previous engagement attempts and puts the responsibility squarely on Syria to earn improved relations with the United States through unambiguous actions.<sup>26</sup> The purpose of this new approach is “an effort to prevent the cat-and-mouse game favored by the Syrians in the past—doing less than was asked and asking for more in return—the U.S. described its demands as non-negotiable and refused to offer specific incentives.”<sup>27</sup>

Reflecting the Bush administration’s new policy approach and in response to Syria’s failure to comply with U.S. demands, in December 2003, the United States added to existing legislative provisions against Syria by implementing H.R. 1828, the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act. While offering no quid pro quo, this act requires Presidential imposition of additional sanctions against Syria “unless it ceases support for international terrorist groups, ends its occupation of Lebanon, ceases development of weapons of mass destruction, and ceases supporting or facilitating terrorist activity in Iraq.”<sup>28</sup> In May 2004, in light of Syria’s failure to meet any of these conditions adequately, the United States did, in fact, impose additional sanctions. Moreover, under provisions of the Patriot Act, it also

severed accounts with the Commercial Bank of Syria due to allegations of money laundering. President Bush also authorized the freezing of some individual and Syrian government accounts in accordance with the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.<sup>29</sup>

However, to date, U.S. sanctions, anti-Syrian rhetoric, political pressure, and its non-engagement policy have yielded few results and possibly have even been counterproductive. Moreover, since Syria's trade with the United States is minimal, U.S. actions probably have contributed to Syria's increased focus on further improving its relations with its main trading partner, the European Union (E.U), as well as other U.S. world competitors, thus reducing what limited leverage H.R. 1828 potentially may have provided.<sup>30</sup> However, Syria is still extremely vulnerable to international economic pressure. Desperate to improve its economy and now facing broad international pressure following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Syria faces potentially new sanctions under Resolution 1559. More importantly, however, a one billion dollar trade and aid agreement with the E.U. is "contingent on its full compliance with UN Resolution 1559...."<sup>31</sup>

Although the regime is clearly vulnerable and its future doubtful, if Syria manages to weather its current Lebanon crisis and continues to improve its economic ties with the European Union and others, it is difficult to imagine how Washington's tougher policy of non-negotiable demands, non-engagement, and no incentives—in effect an all stick-and-no-carrot approach—could have much chance of succeeding in bringing Syria around to its demands. Indeed, too much U.S. pressure could drive the Syrian regime further into the Iranian camp, which can only be regarded as a very negative outcome. It could also force Syria to calculate erroneously that it must defend itself by deflecting attention or creating crisis elsewhere. Since it would be impractical for it to engage in unilateral military action, and because Syria could claim some degree of plausible denial by pointing to its U.N.-verified withdrawal from Lebanon, it is conceivable that Syria may act through proxies by actually increasing support and guidance to Lebanese Hezbollah and other terrorist groups to step-up attacks against Israel or to incite additional instability inside of Lebanon. Any new attacks against Israel from these Lebanon-based groups could spark over-reaction from Israel and result in further destabilization of an already precarious Lebanon. Any direct Israeli retaliation against Syria could also work to the temporary benefit of the Assad regime by diverting at least some domestic attention toward a common external enemy and away from Syria's internal problems and the regime's domestic failings. Despite any of these potential misgivings surrounding a tougher U.S. policy approach toward Syria, some believe that it does not go far enough. Indeed, many see a complete

change of regime in Syria as the only viable solution to achieving U.S. interests and removing Syria as an impediment to Middle East peace.

#### Regime Change as an Option

Facing mounting international pressure over Lebanon, its greatest crisis in decades, and continually plagued by domestic challenges, Syria finds itself increasingly desperate and isolated from the Middle Eastern community and much of the rest of the world.<sup>32</sup> Fully aware of the current Syrian vulnerability and increasingly frustrated by its failure to comply fully with U.N. Resolutions and U.S. demands with regard to its support to the insurgency in Iraq, many in Washington see dim prospects for ever cultivating a productive relationship with Syria and believe it is now time for a regime change. In the words of one analyst, "The Bush administration appears to have abandoned any attempt at engagement. Instead, it is pursuing regime change on the cheap through a deliberate policy of destabilization intended to uproot the Assad regime through external pressure."<sup>33</sup> A similar sentiment was echoed by the former U.S. ambassador to Syria, Theodore Kattouf, who stated, "My sense is that this administration is willing to roll the dice and take a chance on a post-Bashar al-Assad leadership if he is not willing to drastically change Syria's internal and foreign policies."<sup>34</sup> If we assume that the analysts are correct in their assessments, it is important to appraise both the possible advantages and risks to U.S. interests resulting from regime change as the preferred solution to Syrian intransigence.

#### Advantages of Regime Change

An end to the seemingly incorrigible Aliwite-dominated Assad regime poses obvious and significant potential advantages to furthering U.S. efforts in Iraq and in achieving the broader goal of eventual Arab-Israeli peace. Given a population with an overwhelming Sunni religious majority, it is likely that a Sunni-dominated, majority government would emerge to replace the Assad regime.<sup>35</sup> Although there is no guarantee that a successor Sunni regime would be naturally predisposed to being pro-United States, it is logical that a neophyte government would at least be less recalcitrant and antagonistic than the current regime. If a new, more moderate government were to materialize and simply adopt even a relatively neutral stance regarding U.S. regional interests, that alone could ultimately provide the United States some additional regional political advantage and in the end improve U.S. efforts in Iraq as well as eventually improve Israeli security. A new government would, through necessity, have to seek economic and security assurances and improvements to ensure its survival. As an overwhelmingly Sunni nation, it is likely that Syria would look to its Sunni neighbors such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia for regional support. Accordingly, given the largely positive relationship between the United

States and the regional Sunni states, this association would provide a viable foundation for developing a positive and cooperative affiliation with a new Syria, at least indirectly. Similarly, a new Syrian government would likely seek to maintain and probably increase its economic opportunities with the European Union and its member nations. Once again, the United States' relationship with such third party nations could provide significant inroads into fostering a positive liaison with a new Syrian government.

Further, moderate Iraqi Sunnis may see a Sunni-led Syria as a counter to what many of them fear as an emerging Shia dominated Iraq, thus assuaging Iraqi Sunni fears of regional isolation and domination while also removing perceptions of U.S. favoritism toward Shiites. Other regional U.S. partners, who themselves are predominately Sunni (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, etc.) would also likely perceive this as a positive development. Moreover, a more moderate and cooperative Syrian government also probably would share at least some intelligence and exert greater efforts to assist U.S. attempts to stop the flow of foreign fighters and other insurgent support to Iraq. It may also cooperate more substantially in identifying and handing over any former Iraqi Baathists or Al Qaeda responsible for planning and financing the Iraq insurgency and operating from Syria. A moderate Syria would also be a much-reduced threat to Israel and the Peace Process. For the first time in decades, a peace agreement between Israel and Syria might become reality. Furthermore, removing, or at least significantly diminishing, Syrian support to Lebanese Hezbollah and anti-Israeli Palestinian terrorist groups would go far toward removing a direct threat to the Israeli population, as well as another major obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Indeed, absent Syrian meddling and coercion, a separate peace agreement between Lebanon and Israel might also become possible.

Over time, a more temperate Syrian regime could even become a strategic regional ally by providing the United States significant leverage over Iran and "complete [the] final stage of encircling Iran...and open new doors...in toppling the Iranian regime."<sup>36</sup> A Sunni-led Syria may begin to eschew its relationship with the Shiite Iranian government. Such an outcome is even more likely now given Iran's recent gravitation toward becoming somewhat of an international pariah due to its radical and provocative stance on Israel and its refusal to comply with the international community's concerns over its nuclear program. Losing the cooperation of Syria, currently its only ally in the Middle East other than the Lebanese Hezbollah would significantly isolate and weaken Iran both politically and militarily. Further, without Damascus' cooperation, Iran's ability to provide supplies and assistance to its Lebanese Hezbollah clients would become far more difficult. Finally, regime change in Syria may also encourage activism by reform and

opposition groups in Iran, eventually leading to an end to the fundamentalist religious regime in Tehran.

#### Potential Unintended Consequences of Regime Change

It is easy to understand why the idea of removing the regime in Syria is an enticing prospect. However, we should use regime change only as a last resort because it is seldom the panacea it appears to be, and it may not be the most viable way to achieve our desired ends in Syria. Removing a regime, especially one like Syria's, which by most accounts may be on the verge of toppling from within anyway, is often not exceedingly difficult. The most difficult challenge is in replacing the former regime with a viable new government and managing the many unintended consequences that can accompany such a tumultuous event. After all, we are experiencing this very phenomenon firsthand in Iraq where the ouster of Saddam Hussein and the defeat of his army were even easier than the most optimistic proponents had imagined. However, over two and a half years later, we find ourselves embroiled in a violent insurgency that has already cost over 2,000 American lives and the lives of thousands of Iraqis, absorbs nearly six billion dollars each month, has cost the current U.S. administration significant political capital at home and abroad, and has yet to establish a viable Iraqi national administration capable of governing without extraordinary external support.<sup>37</sup> Similar unintended scenarios and consequences might ensue from a forced regime change in Syria.

In the prelude to considering regime change as our best, or next, option in Syria, we must begin by asking ourselves who would fill the vacuum left by the ouster of Assad and his Aliwite, Baathist cronies. Owing to the Baathists tight control on power and their effective crackdown on the few reformers who emerged following Hafez Assad's death, there are no known viable, moderate opposition groups or leaders extant to take power. Moreover, the few reformers and activists who do exist are not united by demographics or ideology. Instead, they represent diverse groups, messages, and interests, and they do not agree over international strategies toward Syria, especially with regard to whether pressure or more direct outside involvement is necessary in dealing with the regime. Finally, the Syrian Diaspora does present at least one organized, external reform movement, the U.S. based Reform Party of Syria (RPS), but it and other Western expatriates have meager influence or credibility within Syria.<sup>38</sup>

Absent a moderate substitute to Bashar's regime, several less moderate and equally undesirable alternatives could emerge to take control of Syria. One possibility is the return of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Emerging as part of the Syrian political landscape in 1945, the Sunni Islamist Syrian Brotherhood movement clashed with Hafez Assad's secular government

beginning in the 1970's. In 1982, following the assassination of several Baathist and Aliwite leaders, Hafez outlawed the group and brutally crushed the Brotherhood in its stronghold town of Hama, where ten to thirty thousand people were killed and the remainder jailed or exiled. Today, many consider the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which continues to reorganize and plan its return to Syrian political life, as the best-organized opposition group in Syria.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, today the Syrian Brotherhood must certainly be encouraged by its Egyptian counterparts who, despite also being outlawed, have made significant recent political inroads in Egypt. Syria under the control of the Brotherhood or a similar Islamist-based Sunni government would not be a positive development for U.S. interests in the region. Such a government would likely increase Syrian support to their Sunni brothers fighting in Iraq, could become a willing ally with Al Qaeda, and would most likely continue to support Palestinian terror groups while opposing efforts to reach an Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

Another possible alternative to Basher would be the emergence of a hardliner, Baathist substitute. With much doubt as to exactly how firm a grip Basher has on power over his father's entrenched Baath party elites and military apparatus, who prefer to maintain the status quo, it is possible he could become their victim. One possible scenario follows:

Alawite elders, aghast at how Bashar has placed Syria in the international crosshairs, may decide to replace him with someone who truly inherited Hafiz al-Assad's political acumen [or] some brigadier general, outraged at the embarrassment of Syria's forced departure from Lebanon, may try to move against his corrupt superiors....<sup>40</sup>

We should also note prudently, as U.S. Ambassador Theodore Kattouf cautions, "Basher is not the regime, and his fall would not necessarily lead to the result this administration would welcome."<sup>41</sup>

Numerous other potential unintended consequences of a sudden Syrian regime removal should make us cautious in adopting this tact. Similar to Iraq, a sudden power vacuum in Syria could set the conditions for retaliation against the Aliwite minority or others and degenerate into power struggles among disparate groups and minorities leading to a civil war, an insurgency, or both. Alternatively, sensing its survival at stake, the Assad regime could retaliate harshly by killing perceived opponents and innocent bystanders as well, on a scale even greater than in the Hama illustration. It could also lash out using Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian terrorist groups and other allies to create chaos in Lebanon, Israel, and elsewhere in the region.<sup>42</sup> U.S. allies in the region could also be negatively affected by instability in Syria. Already emboldened by Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, Syria's large and restive Kurdish minority would likely seek similar concessions in the event of a regime change there. Turkey would consider such a development

as a threat to their security as it would surely bolster their own Kurdish minority's expectations and exacerbate their continued struggle with this group. Similarly, the spread of Islamic extremism to Syria could spill over into Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and other countries in the region causing significant security problems and hampering prospects for development. Even Israel may prefer a known and relatively weak enemy on its border to that of a new and unpredictable one.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, though few would mourn an end to the Assad era, removal of a second Arab regime by the United States could send reverberations throughout the Arab and Muslim world, causing widespread condemnation of U.S. intentions in the region and providing a watershed for Al Qaeda recruiting and calls for jihad. Furthermore, U.S. attempts to orchestrate a collapse of the Assad regime could even fail unless the United States is willing back its efforts with military force—an unlikely scenario given our current situation in Iraq. If Bashar could survive his Lebanon crisis in addition to U.S. attempts to depose him, he may be able to fully consolidate his power internally and emerge a hero in the eyes of the Arab world.

Finally, the most compelling reason of all for the United States not to resort to regime change yet, or to continue to pursue a carrot and no stick approach with Syria, may be that it has not exhausted fully all other options. Therefore, the United States should reconsider the merits of its current approach for at least two reasons. First, history demonstrates that Syria typically reacts to international pressure in a rational, pragmatic and often predictable manner. Secondly, it has demonstrated some recent willingness, albeit limited by self-interest, to cooperate with U.S. and U.N. demands. Accordingly, the United States may still have an opportunity to use hard diplomacy backed by sanctions and the threat of force to achieve its aims.

#### Syria's History of Realistic Reaction to Challenge

An understanding of how the Syrian regime might interpret international politics and pressure and then react to them is essential to developing and implementing an unambiguous strategic approach to U.S.-Syrian relations that will achieve our ends. An analysis of Syrian policies and actions over the more than three decades of Assad rule reveals a nation that acts rationally, logically, and within the principle of self-interest. Although, at times oppressive at home and in Lebanon, the Syrian government is not a radical one nor is it one predisposed to ideological impulse. Indeed,

Syria's leadership has pursued a principled foreign policy...to conform to the realities of its region....[they] view national security from a pragmatic perspective, dictated by realism....Thus, it is highly unlikely...[to] engage in policies causing the United States...to retaliate....Most likely Syria will adapt....[and] find a way to work within the new existing conditions.<sup>44</sup>



Examples of Syrian pragmatism in its politics and responses to international circumstances abound. Although Syrian foreign policy from the early 20th century to now has espoused Arab nationalism as a central tenant, it has never based the execution of its foreign policy on this precept, unless it suited its own purposes. Indeed, it uses the guise of Arab nationalism to bolster its standing among Arab countries and lend legitimacy to its own pursuits while using it as a facade to avert attention from its highly secular, minority ruled regime. Syria has also demonstrated perfect willingness to ignore greater Arab interests when it suits its own purposes. One example is in its effort to avoid a clash with Israel, Syria supported the Christian coalition during the Lebanese civil war instead of the stronger Arab group comprised of Palestinians and other Muslims. In another case, despite heavy Arab investment and aid at the time, Syria turned its back on its Arab neighbors and supported non-Arab Iran in its war against Iraq in return for Iranian support in countering the threat of attack from Israel. Syrian participation in the first Gulf War was equally self-serving and it used its contribution as a mechanism to curry U.S. favor, a means of rapprochement with Arab countries, a response to the loss of support from its Russian benefactor, and to legitimize and thus expand its presence and power in Lebanon. Even its involvement with Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian groups has been based on expedience rather than dogma. Syrian support to these groups has been conditional to their willingness to abide by Syrian rules and respond to Syrian control.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Syria has also demonstrated practical and rational willingness to back down in the face of an unambiguous threat of force, as in the case of the 1998 dispute between Turkey and Syria over the latter's support to the Kurdish terrorist group, PKK. Through a demonstrated threat of force, Turkey ended years of tension over what it saw as Syrian support and sanctuary for the PKK and its leader Abdullah Ocalan, who for years had been conducting a violent insurgency in Turkey. In 1998, "Turkish officials...declared...Syria was waging 'an undeclared war' on Turkey....The Turkish military deployed reinforcements to the border with Syria....The crisis ended...with Syrian agreement (The Adana Agreement)—under pressure of imminent Turkish intervention—to end its support for the PKK and the expulsion of...Ocalan from Damascus."<sup>46</sup> This incident highlights Syrian pragmatism and its reputation for knowing "when to challenge and when to stand back."<sup>47</sup>

None would argue the fact that since his father's death in July 2000, Bashar Assad has made numerous miscalculations and even strategic blunders as President of Syria, which the current Lebanon crisis demonstrates clearly. Whether these errors were due to a lack of full control over the entrenched Baathist bureaucracy, reliance on poor advisors, or simply his own inexperience, Bashar Assad has yet to demonstrate the political acumen or shrewdness which

characterized Hafez Assad's, approach to foreign relations or domestic governance.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, Basher's regime has also demonstrated some inclination to cooperate with the United States and the United Nations on their demands, which potentially signals an effort to continue the rational and realist approach of Hafez, if given proper incentive.

After maintaining a major presence in Lebanon for nearly thirty years, Syria surprised many pundits and Middle East analysts by withdrawing all of its security and overt intelligence forces from Lebanon in April 2005. Even though it took this step under heavy international pressure, it was a positive development for Lebanon and the entire region.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, despite hesitation, rhetoric, and some resistance, Syria continues to cooperate with the Mehlis investigation into Rafik Hariri's assassination and recently agreed to allow Mehlis to question, in Vienna, five top Syrian officials suspected of having links or knowledge of the murder.<sup>50</sup> Syria's compliance with UNSCR 1559 and the Mehlis investigation is likely due less to altruistic reasons and more in fear of possible U.S. actions and probable withdrawal of E.U. trade and aid agreements. Nevertheless, these actions do demonstrate Syria's proclivity to respond to pressure positively and to act in rational self-interest.

Syria points to other examples of its cooperation and of yielding to U.S. and international demands. Responding to charges of actively supporting Palestinian terrorist groups inside Syria, the regime closed down several Palestinian offices in Damascus, which it claimed were media bureaus, and reportedly asked the Hamas leader, Khaled Mishaal, to leave Syria. In an ostensible effort to restart the Syrian-Israeli peace talks, which stalled in 2000, Syria has also made several overtures demonstrating their desire to resume talks with Israel, even indicating a willingness to do so without preconditions. This is a significant departure from past Syrian demands that discussions resume from the point they ended in 2000. The Syrian willingness to rebuild the border town of Quneitra also demonstrated Syrian desire to reduce tension in the Golan Heights area.<sup>51</sup> Syria has also relaxed border crossing requirements in that area. Lastly, Syria points to its removal of language from the Baath Party charter that had previously served to codify its refusal to recognize or negotiate with Israel and its participation in various international conferences on WMD as further indication of its willingness to cooperate.<sup>52</sup> However, many on the Israeli and U.S. side believe these Syrian offers and actions to be disingenuous and little more than a pretense of a desire for peace as a way to deflect attention from their support to terrorist groups and from international scrutiny over their suspected involvement in the Hariri murder.

Syria also denies U.S. claims that it supports the insurgency in Iraq and that it has failed to support the war on terror by offering examples that contradict these accusations. For

example, Syria contends that its relations with the Iraqi government are positive and supportive. Although Syria did not support the U.S. action to invade Iraq, it subsequently supported U.N. Security Resolutions designed to provide for security and to rebuild Iraq with the involvement of the international community.<sup>53</sup> Following the June 2004, Iraqi Transfer of Authority, Syria also pledged to support the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) by securing borders and returning Iraqi assets.<sup>54</sup> Syria also reestablished diplomatic relations with Iraq in November 2004.<sup>55</sup> Following the establishment of the IIG, one Syrian official even remarked, "We know [the IIG president, Ayad] Allawi well, we worked closely with him in the past against Saddam. We want good relations with his government; perhaps, that will even help us with the U.S."<sup>56</sup> Syria and its defenders point to other evidence of its cooperation with the U.S. In one example, after the September 11 attacks, finding a common enemy in the form of Islamic extremists with connections to their old Muslim Brotherhood nemeses, Syria provided Washington with key intelligence on Al Qaeda operatives, cooperated with CIA and FBI intelligence gathering, and was credited for saving American lives in the process.<sup>57</sup> Syria also claims to have tightened border security and says it does not allow infiltration. Indeed, Western diplomats confirmed that during U.S. offensive operations in Fallujah "Syria had significantly bolstered its border surveillance."<sup>58</sup> Syria also claims to have difficulty in controlling their over 600-kilometer border, a task complicated by the presence of several Sunni Arab tribes who have for centuries run smuggling operations across this border and are reportedly being paid by Iraqi insurgents to transport people and weapons, and even to attack U.S. and Iraqi forces.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Syria points to invitations for U.S. and Iraqi troops to visit its border positions, extradition of suspected insurgents to their native countries, the return of some Iraqi assets, and cooperation in the January 2005 Iraqi elections as further proof of its effort to comply with U.S. demands regarding Iraq and the insurgency.<sup>60</sup>

However, Washington places little credence in any Syrian claims or overtures given Syria's history of subterfuge in its relations with the United States. Echoing a justifiably ingrained mistrust of the Assad regime, the U.S. counters Syrian claims of virtue and cooperation as "doing less than was asked and asking for more in return" and by pointing to what it considers to be a Syrian half-hearted, incremental strategy characterized by "belatedly cooperating on some issues, [which] confirmed U.S. suspicions that it was holding back—and in many cases flatly lying...by cooperating only under duress; it validated U.S. belief...sticks, not carrots, was the key to further movement."<sup>61</sup> Few doubt that Syria could do more if it chose to do so. However, some also seek to moderate Washington's acute view of Syrian recalcitrance by offering that the Bush Administration has "inflated" Syrian involvement in the insurgency and

used it as a “scapegoat” thus reflecting “more a frustration with the insurgency than either diplomatic reality or domestic conditions within Syria.”<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of the merits or justifications for either side of the U.S.-Syrian argument, current relations between the countries are, at best, at an impasse. Syria claims to want better relations with the United States and believes it has demonstrated a willingness to cooperate to achieve that goal. Indeed, the loss of their Soviet benefactor over a decade ago; increasing U.S. rhetoric and pressure; growing international condemnation of Iran and the concomitant potential to spoil improving Syrian relations with Europe due to their association with the radical Islamic regime; their strategic loss of Lebanon and the ensuing international pressure over the Hariri murder; and continuing internal social and economic deterioration all combine to leave the Assad regime little choice but to pursue improved U.S. relations. However, viewing Syrian actions and overtures as disingenuous and inadequate, Washington has adopted and maintains its current hard-line policy of demands and rhetorical condemnation while offering little opening for engagement and no incentives to encourage Syrian change of behavior or policy. From Syria’s perspective, this new U.S. approach, absent any reciprocity, convinces it that Washington is seeking “at best to humiliate, [or] at worse to change its regime.”<sup>63</sup> It is difficult to image how such an impasse can benefit long-term U.S. interests in the region, including the stabilization of both Iraq and Lebanon, encouraging internal Syrian reform, or furthering the Middle East Peace Process. Accordingly, the U.S. should reassess its policy approach toward Syria with a view to breaking the current stalemate.

#### Breaking the Impasse

To break the impasse with Syria and to avoid what could easily become a collision resulting in negative ramifications for both countries, the United States should consider amending its current strategic approach to Syria. The new approach should incorporate a policy of incremental engagement along with incentives for demonstrated fulfillment of U.S. and U.N. demands and policy changes, backed by an unambiguous threat of further sanctions—and even the threat of force—as the consequence for noncompliance. A strategy based on such an approach must incorporate an integrated use of diplomacy, economics, and military power. In other words, rather than our current “stick without carrot” approach, our course should be, as Secretary of State Powell described it, “a combination of power and persuasion” [which ultimately worked in the case of Libya and] is what works in most others.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, we should begin by considering lessons learned from the recent U.S.-Libyan negotiations that resulted in the latter’s renunciation of the pursuit of WMD.

As general concept, the first step in rapprochement and engagement with Syria would be to return the U.S. Ambassador, recalled by Washington following Hariri's assassination last February.<sup>65</sup> Initial dialogue should make it plain to Syria that the United States is prepared fully to resort to forcing a regime change, but that it is willing to give diplomacy, along with incentives for explicit Syrian cooperation on specified issues, a final chance. Concurrently, "Congress [should] pass a nonbinding resolution, declaring its support of the President's efforts to bring [Syria] into compliance with U.N. resolutions....[while at the same time declaring] its intention to authorize the use of force if peaceful means fail to accomplish these goals promptly."<sup>66</sup> Such an action would send Syria a strong message of U.S. resolve and intent.<sup>67</sup> As was the case with Libya, we should make it a precondition that all talks between the United States and Syria remain confidential and that both sides cease any negative or provocative rhetoric. Taking another chapter from the Libyan negotiations, engagement should include the entire range of U.S. interests.<sup>68</sup> Those interests comprise full Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 and cooperation in the Mehlis investigation into the assassination of Hariri; full cooperation on Iraq, to include a realistic effort in securing its border with Iraq, returning Iraqi assets, and full collaboration in identifying and detaining insurgent leaders and groups taking sanctuary in Syria; a halt to weapons proliferation and any current or planned programs to develop or obtain WMD; and the furtherance of internal democratic reforms.<sup>69</sup>

Incentives for Syrian cooperation and policy changes could include a range of options to include increasing diplomatic ties, relaxation of existing U.S. sanctions, economic incentives in the form of trade agreements, foreign aid, and potentially even application of U.S. pressure on Israel to resume peace negotiations over the Golan Heights and other security issues. The latter will become increasingly important to Syria if its withdrawal from Lebanon results in an expected eventual accompanying loss of political influence and economic benefits that it has enjoyed through its overseer role during its occupation of Lebanon and the security leverage against Israel that its influence with Lebanese Hezbollah and other anti-Israeli terrorist groups in Lebanon has provided.<sup>70</sup> Over time, based purely on Syrian performance in meeting all requirements and preconditions, even normalized relations and removal from the State Department's Sponsors of Terrorism list should be available as future possibilities.

However, it would be unrealistic to expect Syria to meet all requirements at once. Even if that were possible, it could become counter-productive if Syria is seen to give in too easily to U.S. demands. Assad could risk appearing weak before his hard-line cronies—including numerous long-term Baath Party Aliwite elites, and others such as his brother-in-law and current head of Syrian Intelligence, Assef Shawkat— as well as Syrian opposition groups, thus risking

potentially an internal showdown that could result in his overthrow. Accordingly, the United States would need to develop a deliberate, systematic process with verifiable milestones and incremental application of predetermined incentives. Furthermore, to avoid sending mixed signals, a problem in past U.S.-Syrian interaction, the United States should establish a review and mediation process to evaluate Syrian progress on meeting demands and to resolve any discrepancies, disputes, or misinterpretations.

#### Cooperation on Iraq and Confidence Building Through Military Contacts

Syrian assistance in the policing of its border with Iraq and its support of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts should be the first area in which we test the efficacy of a new approach with Syria. The U.S. counterinsurgency effort in Iraq is perhaps our immediate concern with Syria and a desire for a stable Iraq should provide common ground for both countries since Syria also has a major security interest there. Osama bin Laden's second in command, Ayman al Zawahiri, made clear in his recent communiqué to the al Qaeda leader in Iraq (Abu Musab al Zarqawi), that Iraq is just a first step in al Qaeda's broader goal of controlling the entire Middle East and spreading Islamic extremism to all the secular states in the region, which includes Syria.<sup>71</sup> Syria is already concerned with a resurgence of the Muslim Brotherhood, and it has suppressed for decades the spread of Islamic extremism in its own country, a condition that it must realize could only be exacerbated by a growing Al Qaeda and radical Islamic component to the insurgency next door in Iraq. Accordingly, U.S.-Syrian cooperation against Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists would be mutually beneficial, as it would further the elimination of a common enemy and a potential threat to the secular Syrian state. Moreover, Syria has already provided some, albeit limited and self-serving, counterinsurgency cooperation, thus a modicum of precedent exists.

Counterinsurgency cooperation should begin with engagement and mutual confidence building through military-to-military contacts. As an initial step, we should take up the Syrian offer to visit its border positions and further expand this contact to comprise routine scheduled and unscheduled visits that also include our Iraqi counterparts. Combined patrols and operations consisting of Syrian, Iraqi, and U.S. forces would be a logical next step. Border coordination meetings involving senior-level regional and local commanders and their staffs to discuss a broad range of border control issues or to resolve disputes should become routine. Cooperation and teamwork in the areas of logistics, border infrastructure, surveillance, and detainee operations are also desirable and feasible. In what the Syrians will likely perceive as being more provocative, we should formally declare our intention to pursue fleeing insurgents

(hot pursuit) who cross the Syrian-Iraqi border seeking sanctuary. Also necessary would be to establish rules of engagement (ROE) for U.S. and Iraqi forces to conduct intelligence-based operations against terrorists within close proximity of either side of the border. Such operations could include, and thus the ROE must address, both the potential for direct and observed indirect fires as well as actual crossings into Syrian territory under exceptional circumstances. Finally, our highest counterinsurgency priority should be to develop intelligence sharing and cooperation with Syria. Given Syria's pervasive internal intelligence apparatus and demonstrated initial willingness following the 9/11 attacks to cooperate with the CIA, over time, the potential to disrupt or destroy insurgent and terrorist networks could be extensive. As it has recently done in other countries "once reproached or ignored," the CIA may eventually establish a joint operations center in Syria to "work side-by-side to track and capture terrorists" while "persuading and empowering" Syria to help in the war on terror.<sup>72</sup> Intelligence sharing should range from the tactical level of tracking low-level insurgents, jihadists, and tribal facilitators along the border to identifying and apprehending high-level Al Qaeda leaders or former Iraqi Baathists who plan and finance the insurgency. Potentially, given its historical alliance with Tehran and its concomitant in depth knowledge of the Islamic regime, Syria could also eventually become a valuable source of intelligence on Iran.

#### Furthering Syria-Israel Peace and Security

Achieving the U.S. interests of gaining genuine Syrian commitment for advancing the Arab-Israeli Peace Process and a halt to Syrian support for Lebanese Hezbollah and radical Palestinian groups will be difficult tasks and true tests of Syrian willingness to modify its behavior. To achieve these goals, in return, the United States should be willing to broker renewed peace talks between Syria and Israel, to include negotiations to resolve the Golan Heights issue. However, such talks should occur only on the condition that Syria meets specific prerequisites. First, it should renounce terrorism and other forms of violence as a means for resolving Arab-Israeli differences. The United States must recognize that it is unlikely that Syria will completely abandon Lebanese Hezbollah since both Syria and Lebanon recognize it as a legitimate political and resistance group. However, Syria should commit to no longer providing Hezbollah arms or other military-related support, thus leaving its disposition to internal Lebanese determination. Syria must also build on its earlier expulsion of the Palestinian group's headquarters from Damascus by continuing to refuse to allow Palestinian terrorist groups to operate from Syria. Finally, in addition to providing acceptable counterinsurgency cooperation in Iraq, Syria must also comply with international demands regarding non-interference with

Lebanon, continue cooperation with the Mehlis investigation, and turn over for trial any Syrian officials the investigators find to be implicated in the Hariri murder.<sup>73</sup> Thus far, Syria has ostensibly complied with the Mehlis investigation, relaxed its hold on Lebanon and cooperated in varying degrees on the Iraq issue—all encouraging signs of conciliation. It is uncertain whether Syria will continue to cooperate on these issues or will be willing to compromise fully on the others. However, properly measured incentives, applied with a reasonable degree of patience and backed by consequences, which include the use of force, may eventually steer Syria in the desired direction.

#### Exerting Multilateral Pressure

The United States should maximize the extent to which it can work through allies like France and use multilateral mechanisms such as the U.N. framework or the European Union to maintain pressure on Syria and to achieve its aims in the region, especially if they involve Lebanon.<sup>74</sup> It is unrealistic to assume that Syria will change its behavior immediately, if ever. Indeed, pressure and the threat of consequences must be omnipresent to ensure Syrian cooperation and the concomitant realization of U.S. interests. For example, ensuring full Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 and the Mehlis investigation into Hariri's murder would go far toward achieving our interest in establishing a stable, non-Syrian dominated Lebanon. However, that resolution also provides the United States excellent leverage to maintain pressure on Syria because France, the European Union, and much of the rest of the international community share the same goal. Accordingly, as long as France continues its aggressive stance on ensuring Syrian compliance with the international demands, we should allow them, in conjunction with the United Nations and the European Union, to take the lead on maintaining pressure on Syria. Nevertheless, the United States must remain fully engaged in the process and be ready to exert its weight and influence if at any point French or international pressure appears to wane or appears to take a self-serving direction.

Should additional sanctions become necessary, the United States could impose remaining penalty options under the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act. However, given the United State's limited economic leverage over Syria, it is doubtful such provisions would have much effect.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the United States may be able to work through France and the European Union to affect economic pressure should Syria fail to comply with its obligations. As Syria's main trading partner, the European Union has significant economic advantage over Syria, and it has already established Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 as a precondition for increased trade agreements and European aid. Given the extremely dilapidated condition of



his state-run economy, it is unlikely that Assad will risk damaging his economic relations with Europe. Indeed, Syria demonstrated willingness to make concessions to further its economic ties with the European Union when it agreed last year, albeit reluctantly, to cooperate on counter WMD proliferation as a qualification to an agreement allowing Syria to participate in the upcoming "Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone."<sup>76</sup> For increased legitimacy, expediency, effectiveness, and to avoid Arab perceptions of U.S. heavy-handedness, maintaining pressure on Syria through allies and the United Nations could prove essential to the success of a new U.S. approach toward the Assad regime. However, we must never allow Syria to doubt the viability of U.S. military force as an option and our readiness to use it if Syria does not comply with U.S. and U.N. demands. In due course, a carrot and stick approach may succeed in improving Syrian behavior and transforming it into a reluctant, but nevertheless, stabilizing influence in the region.

### Conclusion

Syrian support to the insurgency in Iraq is just the latest chapter in a long history of the Assad regime's impeding of U.S. interests in the Middle East. For decades, the United States has pursued multiple interests with Syria, to include encouraging Syrian internal reforms, gaining Syria's cooperation and support in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, ameliorating Syria's heavy-handed influence over Lebanon, trying to convince Syria to halt its support to the Lebanese Hezbollah and various anti-Israeli Palestinian terrorist groups, and limiting Syria's weapons proliferation and WMD ambitions. Despite several minor and transient successes, overall, the United States has been unsuccessful in breaking Syrian intransigence in these areas. With Syria now facing a significant degree of international isolation over its presumed involvement in Rafik Hariri's assassination; potential loss of political and economic advantage over its long-time asset, Lebanon; and in light of its increasing social, political, economic problems at home, the Syrian regime appears to be at its most vulnerable point in decades. U.S. exasperation with Syria, combined with Syria's current weakness, has resulted in many advocating that now is the time for a complete regime change in Syria. A push for regime change has manifested itself in a new, hard-line U.S. approach characterized by non-engagement, demands for Syrian compliance on U.S. interests, and few if any incentives for doing so.

The argument for a regime change is a strong one. Among the potential benefits that an end to the Syrian Baathist government could bring include the elimination of sanctuary for Al Qaeda, foreign fighters, and Saddamists bolstering the insurgency in Iraq; the removal of a

major obstacle to future Lebanese stability and political self-determination; and the removal of a major supporter of anti-Israeli terrorist groups and thus improved prospects for Israeli security. Conversely, there are many risks concomitant with a Syrian regime change, whether conducted from inside or externally promoted. Chief among these risks is that absent a viable alternative government, regime change could result in chaos and a failed Syrian state that would be ripe for the further spread of radical Islam, which would further inflame Middle East instability at a time when U.S. forces are already fully engaged worldwide.

The potential negative consequences of a Syrian regime change, along with its history of acting realistically and rationally, indicate that the United States should reconsider its approach to Syria. A refined approach should consist of a strategy comprising incremental engagement and incentives for demonstrated fulfillment of U.S. and U.N. demands along with Syrian internal policy reforms, backed by an unambiguous threat of further sanctions, and even force as recompense for noncompliance. A policy of engagement and incentives for cooperation should apply to the full range of U.S. interests, but it should begin with the immediate requirement—full Syrian support to counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq—and proceed to incentive-based cooperation on the other desired ends. Depending upon the degree of Syrian earnestness in cooperation and in changing its policies, the United States should be willing to go as far as brokering new peace talks between Syria and Israel, a goal that should be of mutual benefit to all parties, and include resumed negotiations over the Golan Heights. We must also maintain realistic expectations for a renewed approach. Given its historical record of conduct, there will likely be lapses and resistance in Syrian compliance. While acting through a multilateral framework to the maximum extent possible, we should counter any instances of non-compliance with economic penalties, and, if necessary, a measured threat—or actual application—of military force. We should consider using force to the point of regime change, however, only as a final recourse because, as Iraq demonstrates and as Frederick Kagan warns, “It is much easier to destroy a sitting regime than to establish a legitimate and stable new one.”<sup>77</sup> Whatever the level or type of effort required, the possibility of making Syria a reluctant ally in the Global War on Terror is far preferable to the near certainty of creating a determined new enemy or the prospects of a failed state that is highly vulnerable to Al Qaeda’s further spread of radical Islam and terror.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> President George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," Washington, D.C., September 20, 2001, available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>; Internet; accessed 1 November 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Bashar Assad assumed the Presidency of Syria on July 10, 2000, following the death of his father, President Hafez Assad. Bashar, although running unopposed, was elected through referendum. Hafez Assad, the former Syrian Defense Minister, had ruled Syria for 30 years following a successful 1970 coup. For more on Syrian history and overview see Global Security.org, "Syria Overview," available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/syria/overview.htm>; Internet: accessed 16 November 2005.

<sup>3</sup> U.S.-Syrian relations have followed an erratic path over the last half century. Following a period almost entirely absent of diplomatic relations starting with the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the U.S. finally reestablished relations with Syria in 1974, following an agreement on Syrian-Israeli disengagement. Between the years 1974 through 1979, Washington continued to pursue improved relations and provided Syria the bulk of a total of over \$627 million in various forms of economic, military, and developmental aid since 1950. Alfred B. Prados, "Syria: U.S. Relations and Bilateral Issues," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief for Congress, The Library of Congress, (updated December 9, 2004): 11. Relations deteriorated again beginning in 1979 when the U.S. added Syria to list of state sponsors of terrorism due to the Hafez Assad regime's support for various Palestinian terrorist groups and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Although Syria still remains on the terrorism sponsor list today, relations improved between the U.S. and Syria throughout the 1990's and early 2000. Improved relations began again with Syrian participation in the U.S. led coalition during the first Gulf War to remove Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This cooperation was followed by close cooperation on the Taif Accord, which ended the Lebanese Civil War; Syrian participation in constructive bilateral talks with Israel that only narrowly missed achieving what could have become major breakthroughs in resolving disputed territory and security issues; and initial cooperation with U.S. intelligence following the September 11, 2001 attacks. However, U.S. Syrian relations soured again in 2003 when Syria opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Relations have continued a downward spiral due to gathering evidence of Syrian support to the Iraq insurgency. Relations are currently at a new low with the U.S. having recalled its Ambassador following strong suspicion of Syrian involvement in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri. U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Syria," Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, (October 2005); available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm>; Internet: accessed 2 November 2005. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred B. Prados and Jeremy M. Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, The Library of Congress, (updated February 28, 2005): 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> President George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), President's Foreword.

<sup>6</sup> President George W. Bush, "Bush Calls for United Response to Syria Following Mehli Report," interview by Al Arabiya Television, 24 October 2005, Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=October>; Internet: accessed 8 November 2005.

<sup>7</sup> The U.S. interest in preventing WMD and proliferation of other weapons is not unique to Syria, but also applicable to most other countries in this region and elsewhere. This SRP will not address this interest in detail. However, of note, Syria relies mainly on Russia for its weapons needs, but its proliferation aspirations have been hampered in recent years by its poor economic conditions and its indebtedness to Russia. Nevertheless, its arsenal includes a large number of ballistic missiles, chemical weapons, air defense missiles and some modern conventional ground and air systems. Syria is not known to have a viable biological weapons program, but it is believed to have conducted some research and development in this area. Similarly, its nuclear aspirations are also unclear, but it does possess one small Chinese research reactor. A signatory to the 1969 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Syria has not, however, agreed to short-notice inspections of its reactor or related facilities. For additional background information on Syrian arms proliferation and the status of its WMD acquisition initiatives see Alfred B. Prados, "Syria: U.S. Relations and Bilateral Issues," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief for Congress, The Library of Congress, (updated November 2, 2005): 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> "In June 1967, Israeli forces struck targets in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in response to Egyptian President Nasser's ordered withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from the Sinai Peninsula and the buildup of Arab armies along Israel's borders. After six days, all parties agreed to a cease-fire, under which Israel retained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the formerly Jordanian-controlled West Bank of the Jordan River, and East Jerusalem. On November 22, 1967, the Security Council adopted Resolution 242, the "land for peace" formula, which called for the establishment of a just and lasting peace based on Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967 in return for the end of all states of belligerency, respect for the sovereignty of all states in the area, and the right to live in peace within secure, recognized boundaries. The following years were marked by continuing violence across the Suez Canal, punctuated by the 1969-70 war of attrition. On October 6, 1973--Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement), the armies of Syria and Egypt launched an attack against Israel. Although the Egyptians and Syrians initially made significant advances, Israel was able to push the invading armies back beyond the 1967 cease-fire lines by the time the United States and the Soviet Union helped bring an end to the fighting. In the UN Security Council, the United States supported Resolution 338, which reaffirmed Resolution 242 as the framework for peace and called for peace negotiations between the parties." U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Israel," Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, (September 2004); available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3581.htm>; Internet: accessed 21 December 2005.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Syria," 10-11. For additional details on the most recent developments regarding Syrian and Israeli willingness and preconditions for negotiation over the Golan Heights area see Prados, "Syria: U.S. Relations and Bilateral Issues," 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred B. Prados, "Lebanon," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief for Congress, The Library of Congress, (updated November 1, 2005): 8.

<sup>11</sup> In March 1978 and again in June 1982, Israel invaded southern Lebanon, driving as far as Beirut, in an effort to destroy Palestinian terrorists and Lebanese Hezbollah responsible for attacking Israel. Israel conducted a unilateral withdrawal in May 2000. However, Syria claims the withdrawal was incomplete because Israel did not remove forces from the Shib'a Farms region, a small area claimed by Lebanon and located at the northern tip of the Golan Heights. Prados, "Lebanon," 10.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2004," (released April 2005); available from <http://www.mipt.org/pdf/Country-Reports-Terrorism-2004.pdf>; Internet: accessed 24 November 2005. 90.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1559," (2 September 2004); available from <http://www.caabu.org/press/documents/uns-cr-1559.html>; Internet: accessed 9 November 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 20.

<sup>15</sup> U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan sent an U.N. team to Lebanon to verify Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in accordance with UNSCR 1559. On 23 May 2005, the team reported that "it had found no Syrian military forces, assets or intelligence apparatus" but also acknowledged the difficulty in definitively assessing the presence of intelligence activities given their "clandestine" nature. However, following multiple reports indicating that Syria was continuing its intelligence activities in Lebanon, the U.N. sent a second team in June 2005 to confirm Syrian withdrawal of its intelligence apparatus. The team concluded that some intelligence activity had probably continued but that for the most part the Lebanese authorities had exaggerated the extent. The team verified the earlier reporting that there was "no remaining visible or significant Syrian intelligence presence or activity in Lebanon, though the distinctly close historical and other ties between the Syria and Lebanon had to be taken into account when assessing a possibly ongoing influence of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon." Kofi A. Annan, "Letter dated 26 October 2005 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, S/2005/673, (26 October 2005). 4-6.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1595," (7 April 2005); available from <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/aaf6aac927e83bee85256fdd0050fcfa?OpenDocument>; Internet: accessed 12 November 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Prados, "Lebanon," 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Warren Hoge, "U.N. Tells Syria to Stop Impeding Slaying Inquiry," New York Times, November 1, 2005: 80 [database online]; available from Lexis-Nexis; accessed 12 November 2005.

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, "Syria After Lebanon, Lebanon After Syria," Middle East Report No. 39, (April 12, 2005), 1.

<sup>20</sup> David Shelby, "U.S. Envoy Warns Syria to Change Pro-Terrorist Policies on Iraq," (12 September 2005); available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/syria/2005/syria-050912-usia01.htm>; Internet: accessed 2 November 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 18.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iraq's Evolving Insurgency," (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 5, 2005), 66. and Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 18.

<sup>23</sup> Cordesman, 66.

<sup>24</sup> Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 18.

<sup>25</sup> Cordesman, 67.

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Syria's ingrained history and continued attempts to engage in "cat-and-mouse" and quid pro quo politics is very likely directly attributable to the shrewd nature of its former leader for over three decades, Hafez Assad. U.S. Ambassador Dennis Ross, who served as the U.S. lead on the Middle East Peace Process for both the George H. Bush and Clinton administrations and who spent many hours with Hafez Assad provides personal insight into the former Syrian leader's character and view toward international relations. According to Ambassador Ross, Hafez "treated every point raised [in a negotiation] as a contest." He had a "zero-sum mindset and perception of negotiations as the process of attrition, rather than a give-and-take.... [and] no issue was too small to debate." Furthermore, he viewed leverage as crucial to regime survival and "he was guided by a belief that Syria must never reveal its weaknesses....[thus placing] great importance on maintaining his leverage [for example, influence with Hezbollah, Hamas etc as a counter to Israel] and was loath to surrender any of it." Thus, he would not concede any more than was necessary to achieve the issue at hand. Finally, he was a "good calculator of power...careful not to cross certain thresholds....he knew when to challenge and when to stand back." Dennis Ross, "U.S. Policy toward a Weak Assad," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Summer 2005): 87-88.

<sup>28</sup> Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 21.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Syria," 12-16.

<sup>30</sup> Ronald Bruce St John, "Syria's Baath Party Congress: A Watershed for President Assad," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, (June 2, 2005); available from <http://www.fpif.org>; Internet: accessed 24 November 2005. Despite Washington's effort to isolate the Syrian regime, it has still managed some notable successes. In an effort to strengthen international political and economic ties, beginning in July 2004, Bashar visited China and also managed to reschedule debts to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania. It also managed to get Russia to write off \$9.8 billion of its total \$13.4 billion total debt. Syria also improved relations with the Palestinian Authority and reduced tensions with Jordan through a border demarcation agreement. International Crisis Group, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Bruce St John, "Syria's Baath Party Congress: A Watershed for President Assad," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, (June 2, 2005); available from <http://www.fpif.org>; Internet: accessed 24 November 2005.

<sup>32</sup> In addition to international pressures, the Syrian government also faces numerous domestic challenges to its tenuous grip on power. Led by the minority Alawite sect, the Assad government faces a growing internal reform movement supported by expatriate Syrians who provide increasing external pressure via Western governments like the U.S. and Europe. The government is also fearful of future discontent or even rebellion, by its large Kurdish minority. This Kurdish minority, which accounts for nearly two million of the total Syrian population of 16 million, occupies many of Syria's oil and agriculturally rich areas. They have become

increasingly restive under Syrian Baathist domination as they monitor closely the success and growing autonomy of their fellow Kurds in neighboring Iraq. Syria also worries about the possible resurgence of radical Islam. Syria managed to defeat radical Islamic movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 1970's and 1980's and continues to closely monitor and control religious influence. However, with a 70 percent Sunni majority population and a virulently radical Islamic component to the insurgency in neighboring Iraq, there is ample cause for concern. Finally, with an increasingly shrinking Soviet-style economy, meager foreign investment, loss of black-market Iraqi oil, and a growing population, Syria's economic decline continues. Prados, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 4-16. Moreover, Syria's loss of influence in Lebanon will exacerbate their economic dilemma since the "Lebanese economy is vital to Syria's own financial health...[and]absorbs thousands of migrant Syrian workers...[and] Lebanese banks are valuable sources of capital for Syrian businesses." Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 19. The loss of Lebanon may also have additional, non-economic strategic implications for Syria. In addition to loss of national prestige and further international isolation, Syria also stands to lose influence with the Lebanon-based Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Terrorist groups that it has leveraged as a counter to Israeli military dominance in the region. International Crisis Group, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Bruce St John, "Syria's Baath Party Congress: A Watershed for President Assad," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, (June 2, 2005); available from <http://www.fpiif.org>; Internet: accessed 24 November 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Eli Lake, "Policy on Syria Moves Toward Regime Change," *The New York Sun*, 8 June 2005; available from [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research\\_topics/research\\_topics\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=280244&attrib\\_id=10519](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research_topics/research_topics_show.htm?doc_id=280244&attrib_id=10519); Internet: accessed 24 November 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Hamoud Salhi, "Syria's Threat to America's National Interest," *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 4 (April 2005): 5. Syrian ethnic demographics consist of the following: of a population of 18.2 million, 90% Arab, 9% Kurds, and the remainder are primarily Armenians, Circassians, and Turkomans. Religiously, Sunni Muslims comprise 74%, Alawis 12%, Christians 10%, Druze 3% and the remainder are minorities of other Muslim sects, Jews, and Yazidis. Bashar Assad and the Syrian ruling elites are members of the Alawis sect, which is considered an off-shoot of the Shiite religion and are considered heretics by many Sunni. U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Syria," Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, (October 2005); available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm>; Internet: accessed 2 November 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Salhi, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Hanna Fischer and JoAnne O'Bryant, "Iraq: Summary of U.S. Casualties," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, The Library of Congress, (November 17, 2005); available from <http://webl.whs.osd.mil/mm/casualty/OIF-Total.pdf>; Internet: accessed 1 December 2005 and Institute for Policy Studies and Foreign Policy in Focus, "The Mounting Costs of the Iraq War," (August 31, 2005); available from <http://www.ips-dc.org/iraq/quagmire/cow.pdf>; Internet: accessed 2 December 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Bayanouni and the Muslim Brotherhood," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, November 9, 2005, A25; available from <http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/2005/11/bayanouni-and-muslim-brotherhood-by.htm>; Internet: accessed 25 November 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Satloff, "Assessing the Bush Administration's Policy of 'Constructive Instability' (Part I): Lebanon and Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch # 974, March 15, 2005, available from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php>; Internet: accessed 25 November 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Eli Lake, "Policy on Syria Moves Toward Regime Change," *The New York Sun*, 8 June 2005; available from [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research\\_topics/research\\_topics\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=280244&attrib\\_id=10519](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research_topics/research_topics_show.htm?doc_id=280244&attrib_id=10519); Internet: accessed 24 November 2005.

<sup>42</sup> International Crisis Group, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Marco Vicenzino, "Syria's Existential Crisis," *Global Views: Viewpoints*, (October 26, 2005); available from [http://www.fpa.org/newsletter\\_info2489/newsletter\\_info\\_sub\\_list.htm?section=Syria's%20Existential%20Crisis](http://www.fpa.org/newsletter_info2489/newsletter_info_sub_list.htm?section=Syria's%20Existential%20Crisis); Internet: accessed 25 November 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Salhi, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 10-13. Hamoud Salhi further describes the Syrian relationship with Hezbollah and the Palestinian groups as competitors or clients, not allies. He cites as example the fact that at one point Syria jailed Yasser Arafat, himself, when Palestinian groups operating from Syria conducted independently initiated attacks against Israel, thus risking justification for Israel to attack Syria. Moreover, after the 1974 Syria-Israel disengagement agreement, Syria expelled these Palestinian groups from Syria while simultaneously creating their own Syrian-controlled Palestinian groups. Its handling of Lebanese Hezbollah has followed a similar pragmatic tact. While it assisted Hezbollah by allowing Iranian support, Syria also maneuvered to gain control of the group. Throughout its association with Hezbollah, Syria has been careful to maintain the group's efficacy as a counter threat to Israel while at the same time limiting its influence in Lebanese affairs.

<sup>46</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee, Ian O. Lesser, "Turkish Foreign Policy in an Era of Uncertainty," *Rand, Center for Middle East Public Policy*, (2003); available from <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1612/>; Internet: accessed 27 November 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Dennis Ross, "U.S. Policy toward a Weak Assad," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Summer 2005): 88.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed, firsthand analysis of Hafez Assad's approach to foreign relations and policy and how it contrasts with that of his son's, Bashar Assad, see Dennis Ross, "U.S. Policy Toward a Weak Assad," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Summer 2005): 87-98.

<sup>49</sup> It is assumed that Syria still maintains a covert intelligence presence in Lebanon and undoubtedly retains significant political influence. A U.N. mission sent to Lebanon to confirm Syrian withdrawal and implementation of UNSCR 1559 sent a report to Kofi Annan on October 26, 2005 confirming its earlier conclusion that "there was no remaining visible or significant Syrian intelligence presence or activity in Lebanon, though the distinctly close historical and



other ties between Syria...and Lebanon also had to be taken into account when assessing a possibly ongoing influence of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon.” Prados, “Syria: U.S. Relations and Bilateral Issues,” 5.

<sup>50</sup> The Associated Press, “Syria Agrees to U.N. Questioning,” *CNN.com*; (November 25, 2005); available from <http://cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/11/25/hariri.un.ap>; Internet: accessed 2 December 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Quneitra is a Syrian border town located in the Golan Heights that was occupied by the Israelis following the 1967 war, but subsequently returned to Syrian control. The Syrians then deliberately left Quneitra in its war-torn and ramshackle state as a symbolic and visible reminder to its people of their war and enmity with Israel.[0] International Crisis Group, 5.

<sup>52</sup> International Crisis Group, 4-6.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. State Department, “Background Note: Syria,” 9-10. Syria supported the 2002 UNSCR 1441, which held Iraq in “material breach” of disarmament obligations. Although it did not vote, Syria also accepted the May 22, 2003, UNSCR 1483, which lifted sanctions on Iraq and pledged international community support for the people of Iraq. Syria also voted for the October 16, 2003, UNSCR 1511, which outlined roles in bringing peace and stability to Iraq and called for greater international involvement in Iraq, urging Member States to contribute assistance under this United Nations mandate, including military forces.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Prados and Sharp, “Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War,” 18.

<sup>56</sup> International Crisis Group, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Young, “Syria, the U.S., and Terrorism,” ISN Security Watch, (11 October 2004); available from [http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details\\_print.cfm?id=9907](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details_print.cfm?id=9907); Internet: accessed 3 November 2005. Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, William Burns, stated that “The cooperation the Syrians...[had] provided in...self-interest...saved American lives.” However, the author contends that by this time Syria was already in American “crosshairs” over its actions in Iraq because of the “upper hand” having been gained by an anti-Syrian coalition of neo-conservatives and Israeli supporters displeased with U.S.-Syrian rapprochement. Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> International Crisis Group, 2.

<sup>59</sup> William Kristol, “U.S. Mulling Military Options Against Syria,” *The Daily Standard* (December 15, 2004) available from <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Weblogs/TWSFP/TWSFPView.asp>; Internet: accessed 8 November 2005.

<sup>60</sup> International Crisis Group, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 1,3.

<sup>62</sup> Ronald Bruce St John, "Syria's Baath Party Congress: A Watershed for President Assad," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, (June 2, 2005); available from <http://www.fpif.org>; Internet: accessed 24 November 2005.

<sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Colin L. Powell, "The Craft of Diplomacy," *Wilson Quarterly*, Volume 28, No.3 (Summer 2004): 110-111.

<sup>65</sup> U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Syria," 4. Recalling an Ambassador can be an effective diplomatic technique to demonstrate displeasure with a government. However, it also hampers dialogue between the two countries. For more on diplomatic techniques and principles see Reed J. Fendrick, "Diplomacy as an Instrument of National Power," *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, (July 2004): 179-185.

<sup>66</sup> Michael I. Meyerson, "Decision on War Belongs to Congress," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 October 2002, reprinted in *USAWC National Security Policy and Strategy*, Academic Year 2006, Vol.1: 252.

<sup>67</sup> From a procedural standpoint, according to Secretary of State Rice, the President already retains the powers to take military action against Syria or Iran vis-à-vis "those powers in the war on terrorism and the war on Iraq." Conn Hallinan, "Who's Next – Iran and Syria?" *Foreign Policy in Focus*, (November 3, 2005); available from <http://fpif.org>; Internet: accessed 23 November 2005. Regardless of the authorities that may currently exist, a specific Congressional authorization to use military force in Syria would go far to convincing the Assad regime that it must comply with U.S. demands or face military action and probable regime change.

<sup>68</sup> Ronald Bruce St John, "Apply 'Libya Model' to Iran and Syria," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, (October 21, 2004); available from <http://www.fpif.org>; Internet: accessed 24 November 2005.

<sup>69</sup> As noted previously, UNSCR 1559 also includes a central and long term U.S. interest in that it calls for the "disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias," which references Palestinian terrorist groups as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, available from <http://www.caabu.org/press/documents/uns-1559.html>; Internet: accessed 9 November 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Resumption of peace negotiations and a lasting security agreement between Israel and Syria should remain an important goal for both parties, as well as the U.S. However, Syria's sincerity in participating in and requesting the resumption of peace talks are often suspect, and the regime is sometimes accused of obfuscating the genuine purpose and intent of peace talks with Israel by using them as pretext to avoid being cast under the rubric of "axis of evil" nations. Robert Satlaff, "Assessing the Bush Administration's Policy of 'Constructive Instability' (Part I): Lebanon and Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch # 974, March 15, 2005, available from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php>; Internet: accessed 25 November 2005. Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, has rebuked recent Syrian overtures for resumption of peace talks. Viewing Syria's current situation as being isolated, weakened, and under pressure from the U.S. and international community, the Israeli government feels no pressure to resume peace negotiations at this time, which would inevitably include land-for-peace discussions involving the Golan Heights, which they currently occupy and consider being

strategic terrain. Leslie Susser, "Israel Mulls Options as Syria Feels Noose Tighten," *Jewish Review*, (October 15, 2005); available from <http://www.jewishreview.org/Archives.php?Article=2005-10-15-1718>; Internet: accessed 18 November 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Zawahiri-Zarqawi Communiqué, (11 October 2005); available from [http://centcom.mil/Archives\\_extremistssay.htm](http://centcom.mil/Archives_extremistssay.htm); Internet: accessed 7 December 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Dana Preist, "Foreign Network at Front of CIA's Terror Fight," *Washington Post*, November 18, 2005 [newspaper on-line]; available from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/17/AR2005111702070\\_](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/17/AR2005111702070_); Internet: accessed 28 November 2005.

<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, 36-37. and Robert Satloff, "Assessing the Bush Administration's Policy of 'Constructive Instability' (Part I): Lebanon and Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch # 974, March 15, 2005, available from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php>; Internet: accessed 25 November 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 35,37.

<sup>75</sup> Prados and Sharp, "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War," 21.

<sup>76</sup> Michael A. Weinstein, "Syria's Shift to Retrenchment," *ISN Security Watch*, (October 29, 2005); available from [http://isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details\\_print.cfm?id=10050](http://isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details_print.cfm?id=10050); Internet: accessed November 3, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Frederick W. Kagan, "War and Aftermath," *Policy Review Online*, August and September 2003, No.120 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.policyreview.org/aug03/kagan.html>; Internet: accessed 15 November 2005.